

## chapter 5

# The School as an Organization

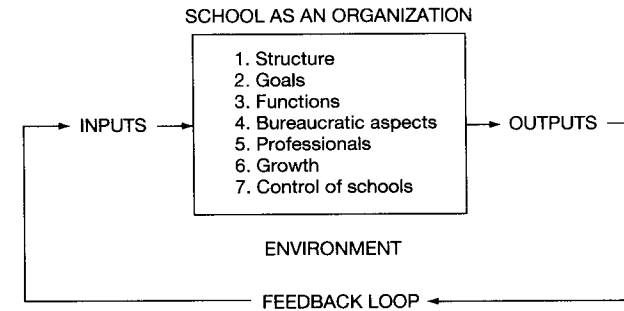


FIGURE 5-1 Open system model of educational organizations.

Discussing what is expected of schools by their environments and how that is reflected in school goals. We separate out the school as an organization for analytical purposes only, to understand the whole educational system.

### SOCIAL SYSTEM OF THE SCHOOL

According to the functionalist approach, the school system is composed of many distinct subsystems or parts, each with goals; together these parts make up a functioning whole (Figure 5-2). If one of these parts experiences problems or breakdown or does not carry out its functions, other interdependent parts are affected. Each part is dependent on the others for smooth operation, for the materials or resources it needs to function, and even for its existence. As you read, picture a school with which you are familiar.

1. As we enter the school we are directed to the *office*. Here a member of the school staff, usually the secretary, greets us and ascertains our business. The office and its staff act as buffers to protect the rest of the school from interruptions in routine.
2. *Classrooms* take up most of the physical structure of the school; within the classroom, teacher and students are the main occupants. However, the order of the classroom—including seating arrangement, work groups, location, style of leadership, class size, and the types of students—affects the relationships between position-holders and the consequent roles they play. These in turn affect the activities taking place within the classroom. Each classroom has a distinct climate and social structure.
3. *Support services* are necessary for classrooms to function; standard services include food, janitorial, and emergency health services. In addition, most schools have facilities for counseling, special services such as psychological testing or tutoring help, bus service, and library service. This total school system exists in a larger societal context, including the local community with its social class and minority-group compositions and interest groups; the regional setting; the state government with its board of education, legislative bodies, rules, and regulations; and the federal government with its federal regulations and funding. A school system—people, buildings, classrooms, textbooks, and equipment—becomes what it is through interaction with the environment.

It is Monday morning at 8:45. We are entering high school. Sounds of loud voices, banging lockers, and running feet greet us as the big, heavy doors slam behind us. A loud bell clangs through the chaos, and students begin disappearing behind closing doors along the corridor. And so another day begins. Each student knows his or her proper place in the system. If a late student enters, disrupting the routine, the school personnel will attempt to socialize this disruptive student into proper behavior and instill the value of punctuality.

There are many ways of looking at the school as an organization; in Chapter 6 we focus on the role structure of the school, and in Chapter 7 on its informal organization—classroom interactions, teaching and learning processes, and school climate. Here we look at the important structural components of the system and analyze aspects of the school as a bureaucracy.

Although each school has its own culture and subcultures, complete with legends, heroes, stories, rituals, and ceremonies (Owens, 1985), certain organizational facts are relevant to any discussion of schools. For instance, the size of a school is correlated with the type of organizational structure and degree of bureaucratization—the larger the school, the higher the degree. The region of the country and a school's setting affect the degree of centralization—many rural schools tend to become more centralized because the area covered is more sparsely populated; community residents in urban school districts often push toward decentralization because of the diverse needs of large populations. The community's class and racial composition influence the school structure and climate, and private or religious schools are affected by other unique variables.

In considering the social structure of the school as an organization, our open system boundaries fall around the school and classroom (Figure 5-1). While the internal structure of the school system is our focus, we must keep in mind that the system is shaped and changed through interaction with the environment. Schools cannot exist independently of the purposes they serve for other structures in society (Katz, 1964). For instance, when we discuss school goals we are really dis-

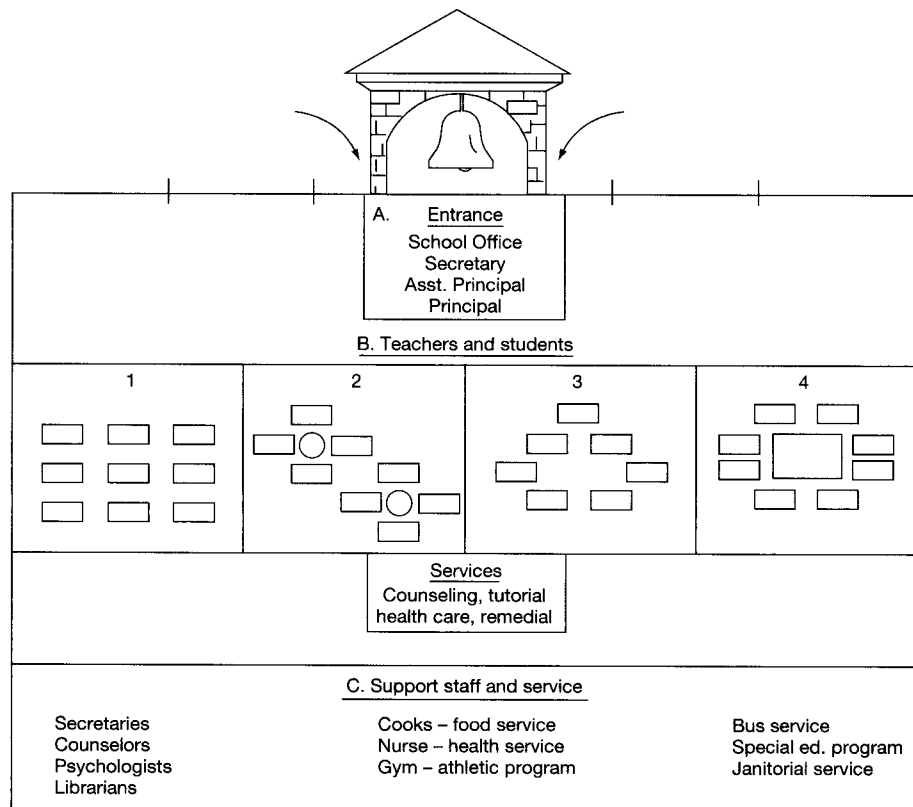


FIGURE 5-2 School system structure and roles.

## GOALS OF THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

Formal goals serve several purposes for social systems. They provide guidelines for activities of the system and focus the activities of members; they imply social acceptance of the stated purposes and of means to achieve them; and they legitimate the activities of the system. However, there is not always consensus on what goals should receive highest priority or how they should be achieved. Witness the controversies over school curricula: Some adults are concerned that schools are not putting enough emphasis on basic skills, and that too many “frills” (art and music, for example) are included in the program. Others argue that children need exposure to a broad curriculum. Schools are also under pressure from many community members to take on ever greater roles, especially in social service areas such as child-care provision and intervention in personal and family problems.

Thus, goals are constantly being “negotiated” and reconsidered dependent upon the interests of the powerful and the needs of the system. We now consider briefly some goal expectations of various societal sectors that influence official school goals.



The business of the school organization takes place within the school building.

## Societal and Community Goals

Each society has certain goals for its educational system that, ideally, are put into practice in the schools and classrooms. In homogeneous societies there is often consensus on key goals, and national education programs determine uniform curriculum and materials. But heterogeneous societies have constituencies with competing goals. Functional theorists hold that these goals give direction to the school, helping it to function smoothly and to support the societal system. Conflict theorists argue that these are goals of the dominant power groups in society, that they represent only one segment of society, and that there are competing and contradictory goals held by other groups in society. School systems are often at the center of political struggles for control of resources and ideas (Torres, 1994).

Over time, goals change. The early sociologist Emile Durkheim spoke of the social organization of the school classroom that fosters the moral habits that keep societies together (Durkheim, 1961). Today educators debate goals for school curriculum, structure, outcomes, and even *what* values and morals should be taught, if any.

The diversity of goals and expectations in the United States is exemplified by the fact that there is little consensus among those who have vested interests in schools—students, social scientists, educators, parents, and politicians, to name a few. This diversity of goals presents a dilemma for school districts beholden to their constituencies.

Each new national administration presents its goals for education. During the Bush administration the plan was called “America 2000: An Education

Strategy" (*America 2000*, 1991). The Clinton administration's plan is called "Goals 2000: Educate America Act" (*Goals 2000*, 1994). It calls for systematic national reform (see Box E-2 for goals).

Other plans for reform also receive national attention. TheodoreSizer has influenced education reformers with his call for teachers to teach fewer subjects in greater depth; students to be active learners; and to give diplomas only after mastery of certain subjects (Sizer, 1985). John Goodlad, another visionary, has stimulated reform at teachers' colleges as well (Goodlad, 1984; Bernhardt and Ballantine, 1995).

The expectations that individual communities have of their schools are likely to be far more specific than the general goals of society. For instance, schools in old, small towns in rural areas such as that described in *Elmtown's Youth* (Hollingshead, 1975) are likely to stress hard work, moral orientation, and other major American values (Williams, 1970). The dominant community members (business leaders, politicians) control school board elections and screen out teachers who might try to change things. Urban schools, because of the heterogeneous population served, have less consensus on academic goals and spend more energy on the "goals" of discipline and control. Suburban schools are likely to focus on success and achievement. Emblems, mottoes, and student handbooks stating very general goals are redefined and operationalized constantly to meet community needs and expectations. Local school goals are influenced by political pressures from community groups, especially where decision making rests in the hands of the local school (Hannaway, 1993, p. 147). It is precisely because of the constant pressures for change that goal statements are kept on a broad and widely acceptable level. This avoids clashes between schools and government, community, family, and other groups. However, vague, general goal statements also mean that schools are vulnerable to influence and pressure from many conflicting interest groups.

### School Goals

A broad and generally accepted model for most schools' formal goal statements was developed in 1918 by the National Education Association's Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education. It recommended that secondary education should: "Develop in each individual the knowledge, interests, ideals, habits and powers whereby he will find his place and use that place to shape both himself and society toward ever nobler ends." While dated, this statement reflects some basic American values, which ideally should be reflected in local schools: good citizenship, or fitting into society; and individuality, or making one's own way by using acceptable means. In reality, these goals are not working for some groups in American society; equal opportunity is far from reality, as we discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.

The stated goals are often different from the operational procedures, which outline what is to happen and what programs are to be carried out in each school. These procedures focus on curricular content, classroom style, and organizational structure to accomplish the stated goals. It is in the school that stated goals must be translated into action; in this process, conflicts over purpose and interpretation can arise.

Subsystems within the community and school may have *informal unstated goals* that differ from and perhaps even contradict the stated formal school goals. For instance, teachers may seek to buffer themselves from the community to protect their professional autonomy, while the school may profess an open-door policy toward parents and community members and at the same time put up protective barriers to maintain the school's operational goals and control over the academic program. Two models dominate the organizational control of schools: highly decentralized schools in which teachers have workplace autonomy, and top-down bureaucracies in which teachers have little autonomy. Some assume that large, bureaucratic districts will have more top-down decision making and goal setting, but data indicates that small private schools often have great central control as well. The degree of control over goals, stated or unstated, and the autonomy of teachers and schools depends on what activities are considered in the research and on differences in the degree of control exerted by boards of education, principals, and teachers in different types of schools (Ingersoll, 1994).

### Individual Goals

Members of the organization holding different roles are also likely to have different goals. For instance, administrators and teachers desire high-quality education, but they also have personal motivations such as the need for money, prestige, and knowledge. For students, school is obligatory; they are required to attend. Their goals will vary depending on individual motivations, ranging from dropping out at 16 to attending college. Students can be encouraged to take academic courses if they appear accessible (not too difficult) and students see rewards (Kilgore, 1993, p. 81). Parents' goals are sometimes in conflict with school policies, as we shall see.

### SCHOOL FUNCTIONS: THE PURPOSES OF THE SCHOOL

The goals just discussed reflect many of the functions or purposes that education serves in society and that help the society survive. Several manifest (obvious and stated) functions apply to all school systems in industrialized societies, and they are often made explicit in goal statements.

### Diverse Functions

Since schools include many diverse functions reflecting competing interest groups in communities, it is useful to look at these functions of schooling from differing perspectives within the system—those of society, community, family, and individual student.

For *society*, important school functions are to socialize the young to carry out needed adult roles; keep the young occupied; delay entry into the job market; help perpetuate society; socialize the young into particular societal values, traditions, and beliefs; develop skills needed to live in society—reading, writing, and responsibility; and select and allocate the young to needed roles, from professionals to laborers.

For the *community and family*, the functions of schools that are seen as important are to formalize socialization experiences, especially in formal learning; facilitate peer interaction; structure socialization experience; help meet family goals for successful children; give children more options in the competitive marketplace; and produce young people who will fit into the community. Individual groups or families in a community may differ on goals because of social class, religious affiliation, or minority status.

For individual *students*, school provides an opportunity to get together with peers and engage in sports and other activities. Student attitudes toward and cooperation with adults help socialize them into having acceptable attitudes and behaviors, and they provide skills and knowledge for them to fit into society's competitive bureaucracies.

Although these functions overlap, it is also apparent that conflicts may arise between the different groups over the importance of various functions and methods of carrying out functions in the school setting.

### Unanticipated Consequences of Functions

Each of the functions listed may have both positive and negative outcomes; the intended purpose is not always the only result or even the main result of the process of education. For instance, schools bring age peers together in the classroom and for other school-related activities. This bringing together enables friendship groups or cliques to develop and the youth subculture to flourish; these groups in turn may profoundly influence the school, as we shall see in Chapter 7. Delaying young people's entry into the job market may serve the purpose of keeping more adults employed while the students receive more education, but it may also cause strain when overeducated, unemployed young people do reach the job market.

### Conflicting Goals and Functions

Controversies occur between community members and the school over issues such as curriculum and school structure. Many families desire to have children learn, but *not* be exposed to ideas that contradict the families' values and teaching. For example, school personnel may consider sex education important for teenagers; some families object to the school's taking over this educational task. The court cases brought by religious groups such as the Amish and fundamentalist Christians are further examples of community-school conflicts.

What to do with early adolescents? This is the question underlying debate about the virtues of middle school structures versus junior high or other organizations. The middle school model—typically grades 6, 7, and 8 or 7 and 8—is winning out and growing in popularity. This period serves as a transition from the nurturing elementary school years to the all-important high school years. It is during the early adolescent period that some students exhibit behaviors that begin a cycle of academic failure and dropping out of school (Ames and Miller, 1994).

Promising programs for middle schools share several features: individualized instruction, evaluation techniques to determine progress, flexible temporary student groupings to avoid labeling of students, attention to different styles of learning, family involvement, student responsibility for learning, extra staff and

resources, and staff development (Epstein and Salinas, 1991). "They are organized in ways that correspond as much as possible to the distinct developmental needs of youngsters between the ages of 10 and 15" (George et al., 1992, p. 38).

The Carnegie Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents produced a report, *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century*. Its recommendations address the mismatch between the intellectual and emotional needs of 10- to 15-year-olds and the organization and curriculum of middle grades; for instance, they suggest building on the preoccupation with social relations by forming small work groups and having an adult available to talk with individual students (Carnegie Task Force, 1989). The director of the middle school programs at Johns Hopkins University Center for Research on Elementary and Middle Schools suggests a transition team to give guidance and control in moving from elementary to high school (MacIver and Epstein, 1990).

Individual students face conflicts also. Formal schooling may broaden opportunities and career options, but it may also narrow freedom to choose what to learn and how to act. Students may gain security and a sense of belonging from peer groups or "youth subcultures" with their own special values; but at the same time these groups' values may contradict school academic programs and family goals such as achievement, success, and conformity.

School goals and functions are carried out within a formal structure. Our next step in understanding the organization is to look at the elements making up the school system.

*Applying Sociology to Education* What conflicts over goals and functions have dominated school board meetings in your local schools?

## THE SCHOOL AS AN ORGANIZATION

Sally Joseph is a fifth-grade teacher, popular among students and parents because of the results she achieves in reading and math and her ability to relate to children in her classes. Ms. Joseph has relative autonomy in leading her classroom. How she organizes and presents her materials is primarily her decision, within the parameters of her physical space and the broad goals outlined by the school district. Yet she functions within a larger organizational system that presents her with both opportunities and constraints. Traditionally, sociologists have viewed the situation within which Ms. Joseph works as a bureaucracy, but they have pointed out the limitations of this model for educational organizations; what works in formal bureaucracies such as business organizations may be dysfunctional in schools. Another model views educational systems as "loosely coupled" organizations. We shall look briefly at both of these models for viewing school structures.

### The School as a Bureaucracy

Bureaucracy! How often we throw up our hands in disgust at the red tape, forms, impersonal attitudes, and coldness of bureaucracies. How infuriating to be treated as a number! But behind the stereotypic face of bureaucracy are mil-

lions of individuals with histories and feelings and experiences like ours. What is it that makes us bristle at the idea of bureaucracy? Bureaucracy is a rational, efficient way of completing tasks and rewarding individuals based on their contributions. However, it can also represent an inefficient, cumbersome organization unresponsive to human needs, as you have perhaps experienced when you waited in line to accomplish some task, such as registering, paying fees, or renewing a drivers license.

By dividing organizations into formal and informal parts (discussed in Chapter 7), we can better understand the working bureaucracy and the way it relates to schools. Although we may complain, bureaucracy serves a vital function in our society. A system based on nepotism and favoritism rather than selection and promotion based on merit, for example, would be certain to raise cries of unfairness and discrimination, and would be dysfunctional for society.

A note of caution is necessary in discussing schools as bureaucracies, because schools are unique organizations. As Christopher Hurn indicates, schools are distinctive because they are expected to transmit values, ideals, and shared knowledge; foster cognitive and emotional growth; and sort and select students into different categories—college material, promising, bright, and so forth—with consequences for future adult status. Organizationally, schools are divided into classrooms, the day into periods, and students into groups by grades or performance on examinations (Hurn, 1992). Other bureaucracies have different purposes and structures.

### Characteristics of Bureaucracy

The bureaucratic form of organization became prominent in Western Europe and the United States during the Industrial Revolution, primarily because it was seen as the most efficient and rational form for organizations with goals of high productivity and efficiency.

Max Weber, whose ideas were discussed briefly in Chapter 1, described the elements that make up a bureaucratic organization (Weber, 1947). His typology of characteristics is what is called an “ideal type”; no real organization is going to match these characteristics completely, but it gives a set of characteristics against which to compare real organizations. The italicized points in the following five statements are Weber’s characteristics; these are followed by an explanation of their relation to schools, as outlined by David Goslin.

1. An increasingly fine *division of labor*, at both the administrative and teaching levels, together with a concern for allocating personnel to those positions for which they are best suited and a formalization of *recruitment and promotion policies*.
2. The development of an *administrative hierarchy* incorporating a specified chain of command and designated channels of communications.
3. The gradual accumulation of *specific rules of procedure* that cover everything from counseling and guidance to schoolwide or systemwide testing programs and requirements concerning topics to be covered in many subjects such as history, civics, and social studies.
4. A de-emphasis of personal relationship between students and teachers and between teachers and administrators, and a consequent reorientation toward more *formalized and effectively neutral role relationships*.

5. An emphasis on the *rationality* of the total organization and the processes going on within the organization. In general, the movement, particularly at the secondary school level, has been in the direction of the rational bureaucratic organization that is typified by most government agencies and many business and industrial firms (Goslin, 1965, p. 133).
6. In addition to these characteristics discussed by Goslin is Weber’s point that *the positions individuals hold in the organization belong to the organization*.

Let us look at each of Weber’s characteristics more closely.

### Division of Labor, Recruitment, and Promotion Policies.

*Division of labor.* Each of us has specific tasks on the job and at home. We become specialists. With busy schedules, efficiency is higher if we each know the tasks for which we are responsible and become adept at carrying these out. One problem that can result from a high degree of specialization is boredom—consider the assembly-line worker who faces eight hours daily at a single monotonous task. However, for a teacher, each student and class is different and challenging. There is constant updating of material and techniques and learning of new knowledge. This relieves boredom, but the intensity can also cause burnout, a problem discussed in Chapter 6.

*Hiring and firing based on competence and skill.* The following is taken from a teacher job description of a large school district:

*Duties of teachers.* Teachers shall take charge of the division of classes assigned to them by the principal. They shall be held responsible for the instruction, progress and discipline of their classes and shall devote themselves exclusively to their duties during school hours. Teachers shall render such assistance in the educational program in and about the buildings as the principal may direct, including parent-interviews, pupil-counseling, corridor, lunchroom, and playground supervision, and attendance at professional staff meetings (Teacher job description).

With extensive certification regulations and testing, personnel policies, hiring committees and procedures, and equal opportunity regulations, school personnel must fit pretty clearly into the positions to be filled. Training institutions become important for preparing individuals with the skills and attitudes necessary for the job. Colleges of education are usually accredited by state and regional organizations. They are required to teach the needed job skills and must be run in accordance with federal and state regulations governing education. The colleges also serve as screening points; those who can fit into the system and abide by rules are likely to be passed on to school systems with high recommendations.

*Promotion and salary based on merit.* Salary schedules and criteria for promotion are usually formulated by the superintendent’s office and approved by the school board. These two are closely linked to the individual’s level of education and number of years of service.

**Hierarchical System of Authority.** You need spend little time in the halls of learning to know who is boss and who is being bossed. The hierarchy of authority in any bureaucracy can be diagrammed, and most schools fit into the model shown in Figure 5-3. The hierarchy has implications for communication channels in schools. Depending on the position in the hierarchy, a person will receive and give out varying numbers and types of messages. Consider your college classrooms: There is a variety of teaching style, class size, and information flow. One typical pattern is a downward flow of communication from instructor to student. Some educators have suggested that modifying the one-way flow and encouraging more interaction would lessen the alienation created in a large bureaucracy. More teachers would become "facilitators" in the learning process instead of "directors" or one-way communicators.

Part of the individual's responsibilities in the hierarchy involve reciprocal relationships; that is, relating to others in the organization. This is illustrated in the use of names: Teachers call their peers and students by first names, but the reverse is seldom true. The hierarchical differences are acknowledged in the formal title. The formal organization hierarchy chart alone cannot provide an accurate picture of where authority and power lie and how they are used, but it can give a picture of structure and formal relations.

**Rules, Regulations, and Procedures.** School begins at 8:40 A.M. Late students must report to the office for a tardy slip. At 8:50 A.M. students move to class period 1. . . . This is the routine set up by rules, but in addition there are rules covering most forms of behavior in the school, including dress, restroom behavior, cafeteria time, recess, after-school activities, bus behavior, and on and on.

Each individual is socialized into the system's rules and regulations. Often these rules are formalized in an orientation program for new students or written in a student or teacher handbook. Most of the expectations, however, are passed on informally through observation, discussion, and ridicule, or by more severe sanctions if rules are violated. Part of our anxiety about entering new situations is the fear of violating the rules, making faux pas, and being singled out for ridicule. Most of us wish to avoid such embarrassment, so we do our utmost to conform. Bel Kaufman, in her amusing but sobering account of the bureaucracy,

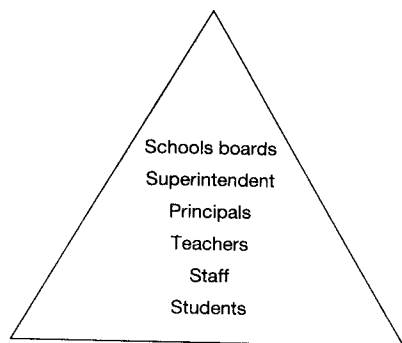


FIGURE 5-3  
Hierarchical system of authority in schools.

provides us with vivid examples of rules and regulations. In Box 5-1 the tasks to be accomplished by the teacher during the homeroom period are outlined.

*Formalized and affectively neutral role relationships.* Those individuals holding a certain position in the bureaucratic organization are treated alike in a formal "neutral" manner; at least, that is the way it is supposed to be to avoid favoritism. The following example will sound familiar. The school is giving standardized examinations. All the children will sit in rows in the auditorium, where they are handed a test book and told to "Begin," "Stop," "Now turn the page," "Close your test booklet," and "Pass it to the right."

Exceptions to the rule may cause problems for bureaucracies. Efficiency is based on an assumption of sameness, and each exception takes time and energy from the organizational routine. If an individual is treated "differently," there may be charges of preferential treatment, prejudice, or discrimination. Formalized, impersonal treatment pervades many aspects of our school systems, but where human relations are involved, formal relations are constantly being challenged, as we discuss in Chapter 7. Human beings do not fit into simple boxes.

**BOX 5-1 Program for Today's Homeroom Period (Check Off Each Item Before Leaving Building Today)**

- Make out Delaney cards and seating plan
- Take attendance
- Fill out attendance sheets
- Send out absentee cards
- Make out transcripts for transfers
- Make out 3 sets of students' program cards (yellow) from master program card (blue), alphabetize and send to 201
- Make out 5 copies of teacher's program card (white) and send to 211
- Sign transportation cards
- Requisition supplies
- Assign lockers and send names and numbers to 201
- Fill out age-level reports
- Announce and post assembly schedule and assign rows in auditorium
- Announce and post fire, shelter and dispersal drills regulations
- Check last term's book and dental blacklists
- Check library blacklist
- Fill out condition of room report
- Elect class officers
- Urge joining C.O. and begin collecting money
- Appoint room decorations monitor and begin decorating room
- Salute flag (only for non-assembly or Y2 sections)
- Point out the nature and function of homeroom: literally, a room that is a home, where students will find a friendly atmosphere and guidance

Teachers with extra time are to report to the office to assist with activities which demand attention.

**Rationality of the Total Organization.** The tendency in organizational administrations is to seek more efficient means of carrying out functions. Schools are no exception in the attempt to achieve greater efficiency; as the size of schools has grown, so have formalization, specialization, and centralization. However there are attempts in many districts to decentralize.

**Positions Belong to the Organization.** The retirement dinner was crowded with well-wishers; she has been a popular teacher, well liked by colleagues and students. She will leave, but the position will be refilled. Next fall a new, younger teacher will come, bringing a new personality and different talents to the job.

One thing is clear: The job description belongs to the organization and carries with it the rights and responsibilities of the position. Each individual hired to fill a role will do so in a unique way, interjecting his or her own personality and experience into the job. We know that Mrs. Jones has a reputation for being a strong disciplinarian, Mr. Smith for being good at teaching math concepts, and so forth. Yet each holds a position with the same job description.

The holder of the position has authority or legitimacy over others only in areas related to the job. Authority is one type of power that gives the role-holder the right to make decisions and exert influence and control in specified areas. In school systems, legitimacy is granted on the basis of expertise and position in the hierarchy. Should a teacher overstep the power vested in the position, the teacher's legitimacy could be challenged. For instance, your teacher or professor cannot require you to get a good night's rest, eat a good breakfast, or even spend a certain number of hours outside school working on school-related activities.

When a teacher retires, resigns, or is fired, the replacement assumes the same responsibilities, and allegiance is given to the new position-holder. Personal reasons for allegiance may vary—respect for authority or for the person's expertise, or knowledge that the person holds power in the form of job security, money, or responsibility for giving grades. But the position remains the same.

Professionals are generally highly trained and have more autonomy and freedom in the way they execute their roles than do those lower in the hierarchy. How much freedom they have depends on their reciprocal roles and the setting in which they are working, as discussed in Chapter 6.

Part of learning our roles in an organization involves understanding the reciprocal roles. Symbolic interaction theory explains the process that is constantly taking place in our adjustment to situations as "taking the role of the other." This helps us learn our own roles and their limitations *and* anticipate the mind-set of the reciprocal role-holders so that we can understand and meet their expectations. This process is discussed further in Chapter 7.

### Development of Schools as Bureaucracies

In the nineteenth century, schools were scattered throughout the country; their size depended on location, but most were small compared with today's inner-city and consolidated rural schools.

By 1865 systems of common schooling had been established throughout the northern, midwestern and western states. . . . The common schools of the period varied in terms of size, organization and curricula depending on their location. In rural

areas, where the majority of Americans lived, one would most likely find the one- or two-room schoolhouse in which a pupil's progress was marked not by annual movement from one grade to the next but by his completion of one text and beginning of the next in the series. Only in larger towns and cities had grading been introduced (Binder, 1974, pp. 94–95).

The movement to mass secondary schooling forced a change in early high schools to more modern models. The main changes included the bureaucratization of public education and the move from the innovative structures of individual schools to strong, centralized structures and administration in which teachers had little power (Labarce, 1988).

Since the turn of the century, schools have become larger and increasingly bureaucratic, exhibiting many characteristics close to those presented in Weber's "ideal type" bureaucracy. A result of the changing size of school populations and movement to urban centers has been the centralization and bureaucratization of schools.

In the period from 1938 to the 1980s, these small, informal systems were transformed into large, professionally run bureaucratic organizations. In 1940 there were on average 2,437 school districts per state, compared with 318 in 1980, showing enormous consolidation. In 1946 there were 3,841 schools per state, whereas in 1980 the average was 1,736. The average district in 1940 had 216 students, compared with 2,646 in 1980. In the 1940s, lay control of schools was strong and few districts could afford superintendents. These moves toward consolidation of school districts resulted in part from modernizing state bureaucracies that pushed for change and increasing numbers of students. Note the enrollments in public and private elementary and secondary schools from 1970 to 2005 (Figure 5-4).

Today there is more than one administrator for every ten teachers, and in some districts less than half of the employees are teachers. The main role of many administrators is to respond to higher administrative levels in the state or federal governments.

In recent years a number of researchers have pointed out both academic and personal value in small schools; they tend to be more personal and students are more involved in activities. A small but consistent relationship exists between size and disorder as well; small schools are safer, have greater communication and performance feedback, and have more individuals involved in decision making (Gottfredson, 1986).

### Problems in Educational Bureaucracies

Any time we attempt to put people into neat categories to maximize efficiency in an organization, there will be some who do not fit into the categories. A further problem is that its very structure as a bureaucracy may cause a school to experience difficulties. Consider the following types of problems:

1. Huge enrollments make test scores—rather than in-depth knowledge of a student's family, background, problems, motivations, and other personal characteristics—the major criteria for screening and placement of students, and thus the determinants of their future.

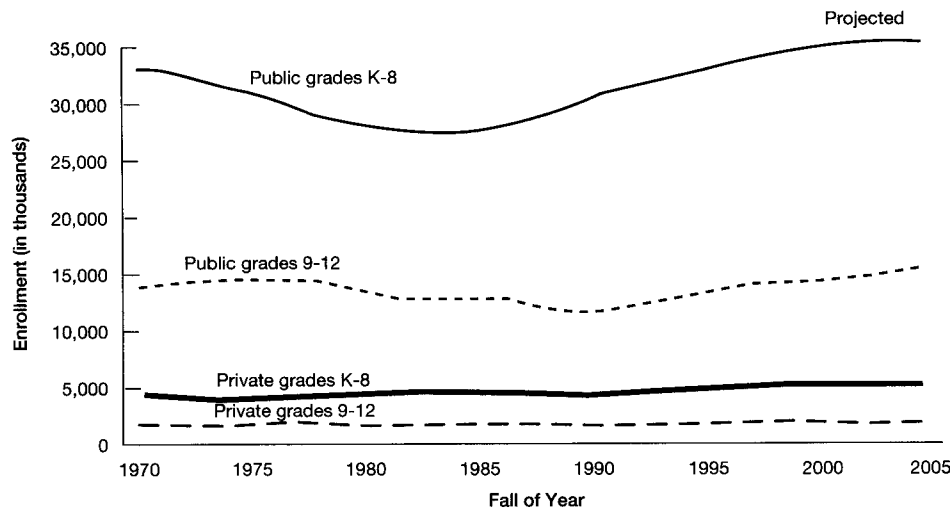


FIGURE 5-4 Elementary and secondary enrollment, by control and level of school: Fall 1970–2005.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics, 1994*, (based on Common Core of Data) *Projections of Education Statistics to 2005, 1995*; reprinted in National Center for Education Statistics, *The Condition of Education 1995*, p. 107.

2. The impersonal nature of teacher-student relationships means that students, particularly the disadvantaged, cannot receive the counseling and support, or the exposure to “acceptable” role models that they need to develop a positive self-image.
3. Official rules tend to overcontrol the behavior of school personnel and are difficult to circumvent when problems arise.
4. Teachers and students often feel powerless to change school conditions and so become apathetic about solving problems.
5. Teachers, and particularly administrators, can develop bureaucratic personalities, becoming insecure, overly protective of their jobs, narrowly specialized, less and less concerned with teaching, and inflexible in their daily behavior (Smith and Preston, 1982, pp. 395–96).

For students who conform to bureaucratic expectations, life in school is most probably rewarding. However, for many students school bureaucracy presents a bewildering and alienating maze through which they must struggle.

Our negative feelings toward bureaucracy come into play as the system gets larger and we are caught up in the rules and regulations and treated as numbers being processed. The following extract from *110 Livingston Street* describes the morass in the impersonal system:

The New York City school system is typical of what social scientists call a “sick bureaucracy”—a term for organizations whose traditions, structure, and operations subvert

their stated missions and prevent any flexible accommodation to changing client demands. It has all those characteristics that every large bureaucratic organization has; but they have been instituted and followed to such a degree that they no longer serve their original purpose. Such characteristics as (1) overcentralization, the development of many levels in the chain of command, and an upward orientation of anxious subordinates; (2) vertical and horizontal fragmentation, isolating units from one another and limiting communication and coordination of functions; (3) the consequent development of chauvinism within particular units, reflected in actions to protect and expand their power; (4) the exercise of strong, informal pressure from peers within units to conform to their codes, geared toward political protection and expansion and ignoring the organization’s wider goals; (5) compulsive rule following and rule enforcing; (6) the rebellion of lower-level supervisors against headquarters directives; alternating at times with overconformity, as they develop concerns about ratings and promotions; (7) increasing insulation from clients, as internal politics and personal career interests override interests in serving various publics; and (8) the tendency to make decisions in committees, making it difficult to pinpoint responsibility and authority, are the institution’s main pathologies (Rogers, 1969, p. 267).

The larger the system and the more entrenched the bureaucracy, the more there is resistance to change, as illustrated in the description of New York City’s school system. A teacher facing 30 or more students each period, six periods a day, is unlikely to recognize an individual student’s problem and take time and energy to deal with it. And that individual student may retreat further and further into the faceless mass at the high school, where 5,000 bodies are processed through the system. Various solutions to the impersonal bureaucracy have been proposed: decentralization of decision making; curricular changes; personalizing instruction; and having students more involved in community settings.

### Schools as “Loosely Coupled” Organizations

Organizations in which activities and decisions made at one level are not necessarily reflected at other levels have been called “loosely coupled” organizations. This description characterizes many school districts. Part of this problem comes from the autonomy and physical separation of levels of hierarchy in educational systems. Teachers such as Sally Joseph in our opening example are spatially isolated and professionally autonomous in classrooms (Gamoran and Dreeban, 1989). Many teachers who desire autonomy support this situation; actions of administrators may also facilitate teacher autonomy by granting them control over organization of the classroom. Viewing schools as “loosely coupled” may be closer to the reality faced by teachers than trying to understand their behavior and feelings of control over decision making through more traditional theories that focus on bureaucracy, control mechanisms of schools, or environment pressures (Leiter, 1986).

Intervention in classroom teaching is often virtually impossible; therefore, decisions made at administrative levels have little impact on classrooms, and what goes on in classrooms is removed from the school’s formal hierarchy, according to this model. Recent research suggests that many administrators spend little time on instructional matters. The dilemma for schools and their administrators is central coordination of educational activities in a situation where teachers are largely autonomous.



However, schools are more tightly controlled in some districts. Where administrations control the availability and use of resources, such as funds for materials, units of the educational system may be more dependent on each other. How tightly or loosely coupled the system is also varies by grade and subject matter (Gamoran and Dreeban, 1989), and by pressure from communities for accountability of school systems and teachers.

One example of a loosely coupled educational system can be seen in large metropolitan districts with multiple layers of administration. In contrast, private schools in the United States, such as preparatory and Catholic schools, are more tightly coupled with administrations that are less complex; the result of the latter in most cases is more curricular coherence (Scott and Meyer, 1984). Teachers have more sense of control over classroom practice within the curriculum guidelines in Catholic schools, which leads to higher levels of satisfaction (Lee, Dedrick, and Smith, 1991).

*Applying Sociology to Education* In what ways is a bureaucratic organizational model useful to schools? In what ways can it be dysfunctional?

## CENTRALIZED VERSUS DECENTRALIZED DECISION MAKING: THE FIGHT OVER CONTROL OF SCHOOLS

In every system there are centers of power where decision making takes place. In the social system of the school, the locus of power has been in contention over the years. Key questions are whether power should be concentrated in one central place or be distributed among parts of a system, who should make decisions for whom, and at what level. Most models break down decision making into two types: centralized and decentralized (Ingersoll, 1994, p. 150).

### Centralization of Decision Making

The degree to which decision making is centralized varies with the size of the system, the degree of homogeneity of the people involved in the system, and their goals for the system. Different degrees of centralization can be found at the national, state, or local level. Certainly control of the purse strings is one key determinant of the locus of power (Meyer, Scott, and Strang, 1986). For instance, the federal government has garnered increased control in education in recent years by determining areas of national concern and allocating funds for education in those areas.

When federal funds are provided for new programs, new administrators are hired to take on program responsibilities. This increases local educational bureaucracy and administrative expenditures, but without integration of the administrative unit. This phenomenon of increased administrative size without integration has been called "fragmented centralization." Funds were allocated for accelerated science and math programs in the "Sputnik Era" of the 1950s, when the U.S. government was concerned that the former Soviet Union was gaining a technological lead in the space program. More recently, laws have been

passed requiring that all disabled children have access to education. However, centralized power and decision making in education are not necessarily representative of the interests and concerns of the local community.

Powerful countries and organizations influence policies and programs of less developed countries. For instance, the World Bank makes monetary policy, but it also "helps guide and create knowledge," which leads to the production of knowledge. For instance, foreign assistance has an impact on African educational systems; education is essential for development, and many African educational systems are in disarray. Therefore, dependence on funds from foreign sources is necessary. The price is often lack of local imagination and initiative in how to best educate a country's citizens. "Instead, as it becomes a set of largely externally defined rules specifying acceptable courses of action, research disorients and imprisons" (Samoff, 1993, p. 221).

State initiatives in educational reform are now moving to the foreground, spurred on by federal and private foundation commission reports lamenting the condition of education. State boards and commissions of education are recommending new policies at an unprecedented rate: tougher graduation standards, textbook and curricular revisions, longer school days, year-round school, and many other reforms.

Many of these new state initiatives are aimed at the very core of the instructional process—what is taught, how, and by whom—reducing the autonomy and decision making of local boards, administrators, and teachers. However, state representatives argue that until the local units and professional organizations take leadership, someone else must. Elected or appointed boards of education have the ultimate decision-making power—on paper. In reality, as school districts have become larger and more centralized—and as the issues have become complex, requiring trained experts—school boards have tended to leave issues of educational policy to the school administrators, giving them rubber-stamp approval. They have retained for themselves the role of mediators between the schools and the community. In this way, professional educators have gained more autonomy over policy issues.

Another contender in the "control of education" contest is private organizations such as foundations and industries, which are becoming increasingly involved in educational practice and policy. School boards are contracting out for more services, negotiating with the company that can provide the most for the least. This occurs most often in noninstructional areas such as food and janitorial services but is also moving into instructional services. In Hartford, Connecticut, "desperate for a remedy for high dropout rates, low test scores and deteriorating buildings, [the board of education voted to make it] the nation's first city to put a private company fully in charge of its public school system" ("Hartford First," 1994). Another example is that of private-company reading programs that promise to raise reading levels of children. In some areas, businesses are providing financial support for teacher training and special programs for children. Privatization could leave the school board more time to deal with educational issues, but it also gives other organizations influence in school decision making and signifies another level of educational control.

Suburban schools have a core of motivated students and parents who are involved and influence the decisions of school boards and school officials

(Wexler, Crichlow, Kern, and Martusewicz, 1992). Involvement is possible when classes are small, expectations are high, and discipline is fair but firm, and where classrooms are structured for cooperative learning to meet more student needs than rigidly structured classes (Eccles, 1994, p. 10). In urban schools it is harder to get parents involved. Large school districts such as New York City have had major disputes over control of local schools, with concerned local citizens wanting control over staff hiring and firing, building maintenance, construction plans, and curriculum.

### Decentralization

Decentralization is an ambiguous word. Some view decentralization simply as an administrative device—as a shift in administration from the national to the state or city governments, or from central city administrative offices to the local schools. Others insist that decentralization plans should embody a design for meaningful shifts in power from central agencies to local communities, not merely administrative adjustments, and that plans should go beyond education to other crucial areas such as health. Advocates of local control maintain that only such plans can temper the central bureaucratic monopoly on power and decision making. Studies of schools that have restructured show students gain in engagement with their academics and in achievement; this is especially true in smaller high schools. Communal reforms go beyond decision making to meeting local needs, being flexible, promoting interdisciplinary work, being responsive to student talents and abilities, and providing mixed-ability classes and cooperative learning. Local schools can target a few key efforts and make a difference (Lee and Smith 1995).

Decentralization has different meanings for different people. Often referred to as site-based management, and popular in discussions of educational reform, the idea involves shifting the initiative in public education from school boards, superintendents, and central administrative offices to individual schools. The idea is to give local schools more responsibility for school operations (Hannaway, 1993). In Chicago, for instance, parents made a grass-roots push for site-based management that resulted in the School Reform Act.

In a study of major urban and suburban school systems, researchers drew five conclusions about site-based management:

1. Though site-based management focuses on individual schools, it is in fact a reform of the entire school system.
2. Site-based management will lead to real changes at the school level only if it is a school system's basic reform strategy, not just one among several.
3. Site-managed schools are likely to evolve over time and develop distinctive characters, goals, and operating styles.
4. A system of distinctive site-managed schools requires rethinking accountability.
5. The ultimate accountability mechanism for a system of distinctive site-managed schools is parental choice (Hill and Bonan, 1991).

Systems moving toward site-based management need to have the support of school boards, teachers' unions, business and community leaders, and parents.

"This involves a growing trend to grant increased decision-making power to the users of the education system (parents and students) and to its agents (teachers and headmasters)" ("Information and Decision Making," 1994, p. 1). Philadelphia, with help from several agencies, funded a school initiative to give local school sites greater autonomy to coordinate curriculum and instruction across disciplines and grades. Teachers working together was the key to revamping schools' organizational structures and ongoing success of decentralized decision making. The conclusions from this largely successful experiment indicate that restructuring initiatives should be teacher-driven at local sites with external change agents and funding of necessary components in the initial phases (Useem, 1994). Giving teachers decision-making power makes a difference in teachers' perceptions of their daily lives and quality of their teaching. Other countries such as Russia are also experimenting with decentralization of educational systems and giving teachers more autonomy (Poppleton, Gershunsky, and Pullin, 1994, p. 323).

While the power struggles continue, some parents are expressing their concern about the direction of the schools by withdrawing their children altogether and placing them in private schools. Some proposals for alternative structures of education have been realized in New York and elsewhere in the form of alternative and free schools. Parent and student input into decision making is built into the structure of these schools. Critics such as Ivan Illich (1971, p. 154; National Center for Education Statistics, 1995, p. 160) have recommended total restructuring or "deschooling" of education, as we know it today, in order to change the locus of power. (These alternatives are discussed in Chapter 11, which is concerned with educational alternatives and movements.)

One thing is clear: The issues that fuel locus-of-control fires are still hot. The issue of school control concerns more than just the control of education; for minority groups, it reflects issues of control over life chances.

*Applying Sociology to Education* Considering local needs, national needs, teacher and student morale, and other relevant factors, where is centralization versus decentralization the best organizational model for schools?

### PROFESSIONALS IN THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Professionals are characterized by several factors: specialized competencies having an intellectual component; strong commitment to a career based on a special competence; monopoly over service offered because of special competence; influence and responsibility in the use of that special competence; and a service orientation to clients. Certain occupations, such as law and medicine, fall clearly into the category of professions.

Because of professionals' commitment to their fellow professionals in the area of expertise, and to their professional organizations, conflict can arise between the principles governing bureaucracies and those governing professionals. Thus, professionals often have a hard time adjusting to bureaucratic structures.

The school system presents a unique situation. Teachers—who make up the majority of staff members—are “marginal professionals,” or what has been referred to as “semiprofessionals.” They share this not-quite-professional status with nurses, social workers, and librarians, among others. These semiprofessions have some common characteristics: They involve nurturing, helping, and supporting. They also have a preponderance of females. For instance, in 1961, 69 percent of public elementary and secondary schoolteachers in the United States were female; in 1971, 66 percent; and in 1981 and 1983, 67 percent (National Center for Education Statistics, 1995). Although more males are entering teaching each year, many are skimmed off for administration and move into positions of power. Even at secondary school levels, teaching has been characterized as a “feminine role,” though there is more of a balance between male and female teachers.

Strong arguments have been made that only predominantly male occupations receive professional status and that predominantly female occupations have failed to do so because of a male political and economic elite that keeps job status and pay of teachers and other semiprofessionals down and leaves them little autonomy within the bureaucratic system.

Teachers have made claims for professional status in order to gain higher prestige and pay, but they have not yet developed the “teacher subculture” (unity as a group) to claim full professional status. This difficulty stems from several factors related to the nature of teaching. First, teaching was not considered to be “regular” employment in this country until the mid-nineteenth century; it acquired serious occupational status with the advent of free, public education, and the founding, in 1857, of the professional organization, the National Teachers Association (now the National Education Association). However, teachers are still employed by bureaucracies, under the direction of principals, superintendents, and boards of education; this they have generally not contested. Direction, then, comes from the bureaucracy rather than the professional organizations.

Another factor making professional status unclear is the question of membership. Professions have clear qualifications and boundaries for membership, whereas membership in the teaching occupation is much less clearly defined.

Professions have high prestige in occupational rankings. However, teaching is not at the top. In data comparing 60 countries with the United States on occupational prestige rankings, high school teachers ranked 64 and 63.1 out of 90, respectively (Tremain, 1977). The General Social Survey Cumulative File indicates that occupational rankings in general have changed little since the 1920s, when data began to be collected (Davis and Smith, 1984). Nevertheless, teaching is still one of the highest-prestige occupations readily available to women.

While most professions operate on a “fee-for-service” basis, teachers receive a salary in exchange for teaching students, and they are expected to prepare students for life after school. A further distinction is that professionals have expert training and a command of knowledge not generally possessed by lay persons, and they are scrutinized by colleagues; whereas teachers do not possess unique knowledge (though their skills are specialized) and are scrutinized and regulated by the bureaucracy and lay public. To put it bluntly, the knowledge and skills of professionals are seen as vital, but “no one ever died of a split infinitive” (Hannaway, 1993).

In bureaucratic settings, teachers must contend with close supervision, emphasis on rules, and centralization of decision making. These factors of standardization and centralization are alienating to those who want to be considered and treated as professionals. The desire for professional status and the frustration of trying to gain recognition, prestige, autonomy, and higher salaries in the bureaucratic setting has led to reform movements, militancy, and unionization of teachers, which will be discussed in Chapter 6.

## SUMMARY

In this chapter we have discussed the school as an organization, focusing on formal aspects of the internal functioning of schools. In our systems model, the organization represents the actual school or system being considered. For analytical purposes, the focus here is on the internal organization more than on the interaction of the organization with its environment. However, when discussing goals and centralized versus decentralized decision making, the influence of the environment cannot be ignored. The following outline summarizes major topics covered.

### I. Social System of the School

The relation of the organization to the systems model was discussed, summarizing structural components of the system such as classrooms and positions of participants within the school.

### II. Goals of the School System

School goals serve multiple purposes in helping define the system’s activities. Goals are not the product of isolated educational systems but reflect the concerns of the larger society, the community, participants in the school, and individuals.

### III. School Functions: The Purpose of the School

Societies have several manifest functions for schools that relate to perpetuation of society. Communities refine these functions to represent their particular needs. Because there are sometimes diverse needs within a community or society, agreement on goals may be difficult to reach and conflict may erupt. Goals also serve certain latent functions—functions that are not stated.

### IV. The School as an Organization

Two models of school organization are discussed: bureaucracy and loosely coupled. Characteristics of bureaucracy as outlined by Max Weber were discussed:

1. Division of labor, recruitment, and promotion policies
2. Hierarchical system of authority
3. Rules, regulations, and procedures

4. Holders of similar positions treated the same
5. Rationality of the organization

Problems in using a bureaucratic model in education settings were outlined, and the relationship between growth and bureaucracy was discussed. Loosely coupled organizations reflect activities and decisions that are made at one level, but not necessarily carried out at other levels. Because teachers have autonomy, this model may come close to fitting many schools.

### V. Centralized Versus Decentralized Decision Making: The Fight over Control of Schools

With the growth of schools has come more centralized decision making. However, challenges from local residents of huge bureaucratic systems have forced school officials to heed demands for greater local representation. One movement for decentralization is site-based management. Another is "choice," discussed in Chapter 3.

### VI. Professionals in the Educational System

Professionals present unique challenges for organizations. The semiprofessional status of teaching, male-female composition of the occupation, and conflicts between teachers and the bureaucratic organization were discussed.

## PUTTING SOCIOLOGY TO WORK

1. Visit a high school—the one you attended, if possible. In your field notes, indicate examples of Weber's characteristics of bureaucracies and decision-making patterns in the school and classroom.
2. Imagine you are from another culture; describe the school you visit as if you had no familiarity with it. Note the norms (rules, behavior patterns, communication patterns, and so forth) and functioning of the organization.
3. What are your most memorable school experiences? How do they relate to the material in this chapter? (For example, what were your positions in the structure?)
4. Compare your goals for high school when you were a student with your goals for high schools now. What were your goals for college while in high school? Have they changed?
5. Analyze the communication flow in your college classes over a set period of time.

## chapter 6

### Formal School Statuses and Roles

*"The Way It Spozed to Be"*

For each of us there is a degree of discontinuity in the status we hold. We have a high status in one social setting—parent, oldest sibling, supervisor over other workers, president of a club—and low status in other social settings—patient, student, low-guy-on-the-totem-pole at the neighborhood gym.

### THE MEANING OF ROLES

Try to recall your experience as a student in elementary and high school. Not only did your status and role change as you progressed through the system, but in some classroom situations your status was higher than in others. Perhaps you won the English composition competition but were unskilled in math; you may have been the fastest runner on the playground but could not spell "whether."

### Status and Roles in the System

This section on status and role structure in the organization is a continuation of our discussion of the internal organizational structure of the educational system (Figure 6-1). Every organization is made up of an interrelated set of statuses or positions that members of the system occupy. They are needed to carry out duties and meet the goals of the system. Implicit in each position is a set of responsibilities or parts to be played that the individual holding the position is expected to carry out; these activities make up the role. Sometimes the specific requirements of the position are written out; these represent the ideal for that position. Sometimes positions are only roughly defined, allowing considerable room to determine one's own role behavior. Often, there is a great deal of flexibility in role performance, especially as one moves up in the hierarchy and gains seniority. All individuals bring their own experiences and personalities into the position. Principal A is not identical to principal B, although the job descriptions may be the same.